

VERSATILITY IN THE SHORTHORN BREED

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This is going to be a popular speech because it will be very brief. They warned me about the time element, because they knew if they let me get started talking about Shorthorns, I would be good for at least a couple of hours and crowd everyone else off the programme.

When my grandfather started breeding Shorthorns 110 years ago in Central Minnesota, there were only one kind of Shorthorns---big-framed, meaty cattle among which many of the cows produced abundantly at the pail. On the small farms being cleared of timber at the time, there was need for meat and milk for the family table, and to churn butter which was the only legal tender---there were no creameries or cash milk or butter markets at the time---to exchange for the few groceries in which the family indulged. Virtually the only cash income was from the sale of beef---slaughtered on the farm in the cold months, hauled 40 miles to Minneapolis and St. Paul by ox team and sold as dressed beef.

Grandpa had a number of trick devices by which he tried to forecast the better milkers among the heifers---length of tail bone, flatness of rib, space between the last two ribs, and pliability of hide. If the signs misfired when the heifer first freshened---no sweat; she simply became the foster mother of two calves and later moved on over into the fattening pen with the steers.

Shorthorns fit that situation ideally--- and no one bothered to wonder whether they should be called Milking Shorthorns, Beef Shorthorns or what have you. All of that came later.

Beginning about 1890, several well-capitalized men in the Midwest began the importation from Scotland of a thicker, closer coupled type of Shorthorn that became known as "Scotch" or "Scotch-topped"---terms that we haven't heard the past 40 years. But the straight-beef breeding programme went on and was intensified to culminate in the watch-fob "compact" type of the 1940's that plagued and nearly ruined all American beef breeds.

About the same time, in 1893, a gentleman by the name of L.D. May who had been developing a heavy milking kind of Shorthorn at his Glenside Farm in Bradford County, Pennsylvania, took two of his cows to the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, Kitty Clay 3d and Kitty Clay 4th, and probably to his own surprise as well as that of everyone else, won the 30 day butter production contest over all dairy breeds with them. This event, along with the growing popularity of the Scottish importations, really sparked the separation of the breed for the first 6 decades of this century into Beef Shorthorns and Milking Shorthorns---or Dual Purpose Shorthorns as you know them in Canada. In the U.S., the cleavage became so acrimonious, that the Registry Association in 1949 was divided into separate breeds which could not be inter-crossed, a mistake if there ever was one---which continued until 1973 when an accommodation was worked out between the two associations whereunder cattle could be double registered.

As we all know, in the sixties era, the Beef Shorthorns in America, along with all the other major beef breed here, had deteriorated into

animals completely lacking the growth factor and yielding tallow-laden carcasses that the meat-eating public simply did not want. In the U.S., bringing the Dual cattle back into the beef registry has permitted the modernization of the Shorthorn type in an amazingly brief time to give us a fast-growing, red-meat beast almost free of the excess fat that even McDonald's won't buy--- a type which is the envy of all our competitors. We in the U.S.A., and I am sure the same is true in Canada, feel that we have by a wide margin the superior kind of cattle for today's market.

If you will pardon the personal reference, in our operation at Waverly, Minnesota, we are using a small band of straight dual cows weighing 1,600 to 2,000 pounds--- we have two cows that have actually weighed over a ton--- and a few of which have milk records over 15,000 pounds in a year, to produce and nurse calves that easily make 700 to 800 pounds at weaning, and which have more than held their own in the top shows in both U.S. and Canada. What is more, if economic conditions required it, we feel that we could go right back to milking this same set of cows very profitably.

The cattle we have on our farm today are basically the same kind of cattle my grandfather started with in 1870, except they are greatly improved individuals: free of the globby fat that hung at the pins of the old-time cattle; clearer in the brisket; and having much, much better udders. In other words, in the 110 year period, our cattle have come full circle.

We believe--and by we, I refer to my grandfather, my father, my four sons and myself---that there never should have been and that there is no need for---more than one type of Shorthorn animal.

Just remember that the cow which was tied to the tailgate of the prairie schooner that colonized both the Canadian and the American West, was a brindle Shorthorn. And she can do her job today just as effectively and more gainfully than ever---but we must believe in her ourselves and leave no stone unturned to tell the world how wonderful she is.

